SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-1220 FEBRUARY 23, 1978
ALICE RICHMANN SCHACHNER

FOCUS: PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

INTRO: PULITZER PRIZE WINNING POET PHYLLIS MCGINLEY HAD DIED (2/22) IN NEW YORK AT THE AGE OF SEVENTY-TWO. ALICE RICHMAN REPORTS.

VOICE: PHYLLIS MCGINLEY'S POETRY HAS A DECEPTIVE QUALITY. ON THE SURFACE IT APPEARS TO BE ONLY VERY CHEERFUL AND BROUGHT. BUT BENEATH THE CHEER THERE IS A FEELING FOR THE TRUTH THAT GIVES THE WRITING GENUINE SUBSTANCE. ONE EXAMPLE IS IN A POEM MISS MCGINLEY WROTE IN HONOR OF HER OWN SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-TIVE:

SEVENTY IS WORMWOOD
SEVENTY IS GALL.
BUT IT'S BETTER TO BE SEVENTY
THAN NOT ALIVE AT ALL.

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE STATE OF OREGON IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST. SHE DESCRIBED IT AS THE REAL "WILD WEST", WHERE COWBOYS COMPETED IN RIDING CONTESTS AND SHE HERSELF RODE TO SCHOOL ON A PONY. EVENTUALLY SHE CAME EAST TO NEW YORK WHERE SHE WORKED AS A TEACHER AND BEGAN TO WRITE POETRY FOR SEVERAL MAGAZINES. SHE LEFT POEMS OF HEARTBREAK AND IDEALIZED ROMANCE TO OTHER WRITERS. HER HERO WAS THE COMMUTING HUSBAND WHO TOOK THE TRAIN TO THE CITY EVERY MORNING. HE WAS AN AMUSING MAN WHOSE FINE QUALITIES SHE WOULD PRAISE WHEN SHE WAS NOT TEASING HIM. HE WAS, IN FACT, HER OWN HUSBAND, CHARLES HAYDEN. SHE SELDOM DEPARTED FROM THE IMAGE THAT

HER STYLE OF LIFE AND VERSE HAD GIVEN HER: THAT OF WIFE, MOTHER, HARD-WORKING PROFESSIONAL WRITER AND OBSERVANT ROMAN CATHOLIC. IN AN ARTICLE WRITTEN FOR A WOMAN'S MAGAZINE IN NINETEEN FIFTY-TWO SHE TOLD THE TWO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, DWIGHT EISENHOWER AND ADLAI STEVENSON, THAT TAXES WERE TOO HIGH. SHE WROTE: "ALL DAY I'VE HAD YOU ON MY MIND...YOU INTERFERED WITH THE GROCERY LIST...AND SET ME DREAMING WHEN I SHOULD HAVE BEEN COUNTING SHEETS FOR THE LAUNDRY....."

MISS MCGINLEY'S OBSERVATIONS ON URBAN AND SUBURBAN LIFE FILLED EIGHTEEN BOOKS. HER WRITINGS BROUGHT HER MANY HONORS, AMONG THEM MEMBERSHIP IN THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS AND HONORARY DEGREES FROM UNIVERSITIES. WHEN HER BOOK ENTITLED "TIMES THREE: SELECTED VERSE FROM THREE DECADES" WON THE PULITZER PRIZE IN NINETEEN SIXTY-ONE IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE AWARD HAD BEEN GIVEN FOR WRITING THAT HAD BEEN CALLED "LIGHT VERSE."

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